

Restoring the Spirit of Place
The Bexhill-on-Sea Initiative

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A traffic and environmental
Study of Bexhill Town Centre

A joint report by Officers of Rother
District Council and East Sussex County Council

ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL

L Robinson District Planning Officer
A Leonard Director of Recreation & Tourism
C Mayson Chief Environmental Services Officer

EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

R Wilkins County Engineer
C Williams County Planning Officer

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 For a number of years there has been a general feeling that traffic circulation and parking arrangements in the Town Centre could be better organised for the benefit of drivers and pedestrians alike.
- 1.2 In addition, Bexhill has been identified as an area for significant residential and employment expansion. Proposals by the Department of Transport (DOT) for a Bexhill and Hastings Bypass and by the County Council for the Bexhill Northern Approach Road, linking central Bexhill with the bypass, facilitate that expansion and also themselves represent significant additions to the local highway network. These developments and highway proposals could potentially have a major influence on traffic flows and circulation within Bexhill town centre.
- 1.3 The designation in 1992 of the Town Centre as a Conservation Area together with the adoption of a number of design policies which are described later brought about the requirement to consider measures for the area's enhancement.
- 1.4 This document has been produced to consider ways in which the pressure for change can be met whilst maintaining the character and vitality of the Town Centre.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The A259 Bexhill and Hastings Western Bypass is a new road being promoted by the DOT to relieve traffic from the two towns, create a better environment, provide better communications between Bexhill and Hastings and with the rest of the county and the country, and produce a better environment for development and economic growth.
- 2.2 From a junction with the existing A259 near Hooe, this new road will run to the north of Bexhill to connect with the existing road system in west Hastings. Access to Bexhill will either be via the existing road or via junctions with the A269 Ninfield Road and the County Council's proposed Bexhill Northern Approach Road.
- 2.3 The Bexhill Northern Approach Road (BNAR) could potentially have a major impact on the town centre. This road connects the town centre with the DOT's proposed bypass. A feature of this connection is the opportunity for development that it opens up in north Bexhill. Both the fact that the Road will connect to the bypass and that it will serve this development are seen by some as reasons for possible increased traffic flows within the town centre, particularly on those parts of the road network which provide direct access to this new road.
- 2.4 The North Bexhill Strategic Framework has been produced jointly by East Sussex County Council and Rother District Council and provides strategic planning guidelines for the development and conservation of North Bexhill. The document has now been formally adopted by both Council's as supplementary planning guidance for the area.
- 2.5 As such, the strategic framework takes account of the improved access to the area that will be achieved by the construction of the proposed by-pass for Hastings and Bexhill and seeks to strike a balance between the pressures for development and the need to conserve the high quality of the countryside close to the built up area of Bexhill.

Local Planning Policies

- 2.6 The Bexhill Local Plan was formally adopted by the District Council in 1985 to provide guidance

for the control of development in the town. Specific policies were drawn up for the town centre which did not foresee dramatic changes in the way of extensive demolition and redevelopment. Instead it was thought that most would take the form of small scale refurbishment and infill.

- 2.7 Policies in the Local Plan were designed to reinforce the area's high Victorian character and were developed more fully with the publication and adoption by the District Council in 1989 of its Town Centre Design Guide. The Guide described the buildings and their architectural details which combine to give Bexhill Town Centre its special sense of place.
- 2.8 Attention was drawn to the fact that very little subsequent redevelopment had taken place and the centre which had always been conceived as a commercial one, remained much as it had been on the eve of the first World War. Surveys carried out prior to the designation of the town centre as a conservation area in 1992 established that many of its original shop fronts had survived and could provide a model for the District Council's policies to provide guidance when new proposals were being considered.
- 2.9 It is perhaps worth emphasising once again that Bexhill town centre was built from the beginning as a shopping and commercial development. It is not, as is often the case, the historic core of a town which has been adapted to meet growth in retailing which took place in the last quarter of the 19th century. This distinctive character sets Bexhill town centre apart from its neighbours, and should be exploited to increase the number of what may be termed recreational shoppers who visit the town.
- 2.10 Policies were also adopted in the Local Plan which drew attention to the established areas of Edwardian townscape which bordered onto the town centre. These areas provide a transition between the commercial centre and the later residential development beyond. New development proposals would be expected to maintain these areas' architectural character.

The effects of Designation

- 2.11 The Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to consider whether they should designate parts of their area which appear to be of special architectural or historic interest as Conservation Areas.
- 2.12 Designation brings with it additional controls over demolition of buildings, felling of trees and the requirement that any new development should not harm the special qualities of the area. Rother District Council has already considered ways in which this may be achieved and the measures they have adopted so far have been described above.
- 2.13 In addition to these measures which are intended to work through the development process, the local planning authority should also draw up proposals for action which are designed to preserve and enhance the conservation area. These may include traffic circulation and parking proposals.

The Old Town Conservation Area

- 2.14 A little under half a mile to the north east of the Victorian town centre is the original Bexhill, with its roots in pre conquest Saxon history. The settlement grew up on a low hill top which gave access to the east along a spur to the ancient port of Bulverhythe. Steep slopes protected the remainder from the marsh below. This topography, though obscured by more recent development, remains clear enough to maintain a physical distinction between the Old Town and its modern neighbour. The whole of Old Town was formally designated as a conservation area in 1975.

- 2.15 Recently, the Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society commissioned consultant architect and planners to prepare a report dealing with how the Old Town Conservation area might be better protected from undesirable traffic intrusion and the area's essential character improved.
- 2.16 In the consultants' view, the removal of what they believe is unnecessary vehicular traffic is the key to improving the way in which the Old Town functions. Their proposal was that this should be achieved by closing Chantry Lane north of the King Offa Road bridge and De La Warr Road between Church Street and the western end of the Manor Gardens car park. By removing through traffic other proposals could be considered designed to restore areas of lost character or make better use of an existing attraction.
- 2.17 The consultants' proposals could have a significant effect on the distribution of traffic flows on both the local roads within and the distributor roads around the Old Town. These effects need to be assessed against the background of the other proposals considered in this Study.

Existing Patterns of Use in the Town Centre

- 2.18 During preliminary studies carried out as part of the preparation of the new Rother District Plan, many individuals and local organisations have expressed their dissatisfaction with the way in which the town centre operates.
- 2.19 There was a general if somewhat anecdotal view that certain parts of the area were subject to a generally high level of congestion; this led in turn to problems of vehicular access and a poor environment for pedestrians. The general view was that these difficulties were made worse by inadequate opportunities for on street parking and not enough off-street car parks close to the shops.
- 2.20 A number of proposals have been put forward which suggested alterations to the traffic circulation system aimed at resolving perceived points of conflict and increasing the amount of on street car parking.
- 2.21 The predominant land use in the town centre is shopping with the largest outlet being Sainsburys north of the railway, immediately adjacent to the conservation area. Most of the remaining shops are within the conservation area south of the railway and are all small in scale respecting the general character of the area. Many of the shops provide for the daily requirements of the local population but others are of a more specialist nature appealing to a wider catchment area and to tourists and visitors to the town. Indeed, it is the small scale of the shopping facilities that gives Bexhill its unique character which has been largely unspoilt by re-development in recent years.
- 2.22 The area south of the railway between Sackville Road in the west to Sea Road in the east was originally laid out as a commercial centre and remains to today. The main commercial uses are concentrated in five roads, Sackville, Western, Devonshire, St Leonards and Sea Road. Between these principal routes, secondary roads were laid out to provide residential accommodation.
- 2.23 Bexhill town centre is unusual in so far that in addition to being built from the start to serve retailing needs it has also retained a relatively large number of dwellings either as flats above commercial premises or within what was originally large family villas. In the main shopping streets between a third and half of properties contain a residential use.
- 2.24 There are some 360 commercial premises in the town centre including about 40 vacant units. Within this overall total are 208 retail premises, of which 24% supply day to day convenience goods, butchers, greengrocers, and the like while a further 71% deal in comparison or durable items such as shoes, clothing and similar products.

- 2.25 With the exception of a small number of national multiples, the centre is characterised by the smaller individual specialist trader. There is a considerable variety of products available as a result.
- 2.26 In terms of its future role, the town centre will continue to provide the range of specialist outlets and by retaining its character and scale will have a continued appeal for visitors and locals alike in terms of being a more "traditional" town centre. Any large scale re-development should therefore be resisted, but at the same time every encouragement should be given to retaining Sainsburys in its current location in order to encourage shoppers to come to the town centre. In this context improved parking facilities may be desirable immediately adjacent to Sainsburys as an incentive for shoppers to use this part of the town rather than travel to other facilities on the edge of town or in Hastings.

3.0 STRATEGIC INFLUENCES & EFFECTS

- 3.1 The construction of the A259 Bexhill and Hastings Western Bypass and the Bexhill Northern Approach Road will result in Bexhill being by-passed with the town centre linked to the by-pass via the BNAR. The northern part of Bexhill will be able to gain direct access to the proposed by-pass at the junction with the A269 Ninfield Road north of Sidley. The effects of these strategic highway proposals, and of identified major development proposals, have been assessed using the County Council's Bexhill/Hastings urban area traffic model.
- 3.2 The traffic model shows that provision of the bypass and the BNAR will relieve traffic from the existing road network, in particular the existing A259 which will experience a substantial reduction in flow level. However, the area south of the A259 will be generally relatively unaffected by changes resulting from these new highway proposals. In this area, traffic flow levels will be more dependent on changes in car ownership and the location of new developments than on the specific redistribution effects of strategic road proposals.
- 3.3 Broadly, the town will benefit from traffic reduction resulting from the by-pass. However, in the future these "benefits" will tend to be eroded by increased car usage. In addition a range of developments are being proposed for the area.
- 3.4 Of particular significance are the proposed New Community at Worsham, and the proposed Business Park to be located close by. The New Community will accommodate, on a phased basis, between 1,000 and 1,500 dwellings; a new Primary School of 420 places; together with other community activities including a "convenience store" of about 10,000 square feet plus further small scale local shops. The Business Park could provide 50,000 square metres (538,000 square feet) of business related uses providing employment for up to 2,000 people. Both the New Community and the Business Park are dependent on the achievement of the proposed by-pass together with the BNAR before either can be implemented on site.
- 3.5 With the introduction of the new development in north Bexhill, groups more economically active than the existing elderly population will be introduced to the town. These can be expected to have higher car ownership levels and, possibly, to make more trips as well.
- 3.6 Currently, over 50% of trips from Bexhill are going to Hastings and this is forecast to continue in the future. Currently to make such trips from central Bexhill necessitates using either London Road or east of the Town Centre, Dorset Road, to access the existing A259 across Glyne Gap, the only realistic route to Hastings. Once the bypass and BNAR are in place the emphasis on usage will shift from the existing A259 to a sharing between that route and the London Road corridor as, via the BNAR and bypass, this would then be the quickest route to some parts of Hastings. Traffic from the proposed New Community and Business Park accessing Bexhill Town Centre and adjacent areas will reinforce this greater emphasis on the London Road corridor.

- 3.7 As a result, whilst the traffic flow on Dorset Road will remain at about the existing level (in common with the majority of the Town Centre), lower London Road at its junction with King Offa Way/BNAR will experience an increase in traffic flow above existing levels, about 25% - 30% , as it fulfils this bypass linkage function and also connects the new developments in north Bexhill to the town centre and adjacent areas. This increase is due in part to new development traffic accessing the town centre and in particular the industrial estate in Beeching Road, but also results from traffic in southwest Bexhill accessing the BNAR via Beeching Road and this section of London Road.
- 3.8 However, any general increase in the amount of traffic within some parts of the town centre is not anticipated to be large enough to influence significantly any existing congestion or to create congestion where none occurs at present. The existing road network should continue to have plenty of capacity to cope with the predicted peak hour traffic demand. Despite the increased emphasis on the London Road corridor, the sections south of King Offa Way should be able to handle forecast flows in the future.
- 3.9 There is the possibility of increased traffic flows on Holliers Hill and thus through the Old Town with the construction of the new developments in north Bexhill. However, the full extent of this possible increase and the most appropriate measures to address the problem will be uncertain until the precise location of the distributor road within the New Community and its junction with Wrestwood Road has been determined, when complementary measures can be developed dealing with any possible impacts.
- 3.10 However, preliminary investigations strongly suggest that the most appropriate measures are more likely to be restrictive (e.g. designed to reduce speed etc) rather than prohibitive (e.g. road closures) and to be measures which, whilst achieving the same objective, would be less severe than the BOTPS's proposals for road closures which, as presented, could severely limit accessibility to Bexhill Hospital and also between the Old Town and adjacent northern catchment areas.
- 3.11 In general, therefore, the traffic model analysis has shown that there are likely to be no significant overall changes to traffic volumes and conditions within the town centre forecast as a result of strategic highway and major development proposals. It is therefore possible to consider the need for any specific proposals for parking, circulation or other improvements within the town centre in relation to the existing situation.

4.0 THE EXISTING SITUATION IN THE TOWN CENTRE

- 4.1 The ways in which local residents use a town centre, their use of available car parking and the services they support are to a large extent determined by the character of its catchment population.
- 4.2 In typical retailing terms Bexhill town centre is not easy to categorise. In most aspects it performs the role of a District Centre drawing its customers locally, swollen by visitors during the holiday season.
- 4.3 At the same time the centre possesses a good proportion of specialist retailers who offer a wide choice of a particular range of goods. These retailers are likely to attract customers from a wide area. An expansion in this segment of the market could provide a useful trading niche for Bexhill and not be in direct competition with its neighbours.
- 4.4 Locally residents currently have the highest incidence of retired people in the County and the highest ownership of a single car in each household (Tables 1 & 2) and this is likely to continue to be a feature of the town in the future even with the effects of the new Business Park. In turn this current picture has resulted in distinct patterns of car use in the town centre which any traffic circulation and parking system must respond to.

Table 1 Population in age groups

Residents				
Age group	Bexhill		District Per cent	County Per cent
	Number	Per cent		
0 - 15	5378	13.8	16.1	17.2
16 - 19	4948	12.7	13.4	18.2
30 - 44	5533	14.2	17.0	19.7
45 - RA*	6542	16.8	19.4	18.5
RA+	16501	42.4	34.1	26.4
All ages	38902	100.0	100.0	100.0
0 - 4	1736	4.8	4.8	5.8
5 - 15	3642	9.4	11.2	11.5
16 - 19	1406	3.6	4.1	4.4
RA - 74	8357	21.5	18.5	14.5
75 - 84	5912	15.2	11.6	9.0
85+	2232	5.7	4.0	2.9
*RA (Retirement age) : 65 years males; 60 years females				

Source: 1991 Census LBS Table 2

Table 2 Car ownership

Households with residents				
Cars per households	Bexhill		District Per cent	County Per cent
	Number	Per Cent		
No car	5705	31.7	25.4	33.1
1 car	8968	49.8	48.2	44.0
2 cars	2802	15.6	21.3	18.8
3 or more cars	520	2.9	5.1	4.0

Source: 1991 Census LBS Table 21

- 4.5 Despite views expressed to the contrary (see para 2.19), the existing traffic volumes within Bexhill town centre are relatively low with little congestion occurring. Peak hour traffic flows are well within the capacity of the highway network providing plenty of scope for growth due to increased car ownership and expansion of the community through new developments.
- 4.6 The circulation of traffic within the town centre is determined to an extent by the one-way system that is currently in operation. It is the existence of this one-way system in conjunction with the relatively low traffic flows that ensures there is plenty of roadspace and little congestion.
- 4.7 The existing system might not be perfect - it would be difficult for any system to be so within the constraints of an existing road system - but where, as part of the planning processes outlined in section 2 of this report, proposals have been put forward to alleviate minor problems, upon investigation it has been concluded that they would in turn create their own problems elsewhere, without a significant overall balance of advantages. It has therefore been concluded that there is not an inherent need to alter the patterns of traffic circulation within the town centre.
- 4.8 Specific junctions have, however, been examined to check their capacity, not only in their current form, but also if signalised or altered in other ways in an attempt to provide benefits to other user groups. Those junctions specifically tested were selected as having less than ideal layouts or about which adverse comments had been made, for example the junction of Buckhurst, Terminus and Sackville Roads. However, no capacity problems were identified and any benefits to be accrued from altering junction layouts could not justify the expense.
- 4.9 Bexhill is generally quite well served by buses with most areas having several services operating to them. The majority of these routes also serve the town centre thereby providing good access to the commercial heart of the town from all parts of Bexhill. Traffic conditions, current and forecast, in the town centre are not such as to significantly affect the efficiency of bus operations in the town and do not warrant the investigation of specific town centre bus priority measures. Bexhill railway station provides access to trains serving longer distance, rather than local to Bexhill, transport needs. Whilst having a possible impact on localised parking demands, the station is therefore of relatively little importance to local access to the town centre.
- 4.10 In accordance with the County Council's cycling strategy there is an increasing emphasis placed on the provision of cycling facilities. Currently there is a cycle route over Galley Hill connecting Bexhill seafront with Glyne Gap, with proposals to possibly extend this along the seafront to the south of the town centre. However, in a town such as Bexhill, cycling is likely to be a less significant mode of transport than in other large urban areas in the County.
- 4.11 As far as car parking is concerned, there are two public off street car parks which serve the town centre, one located on the west side of Eversley Road close to the sea front which can accommodate 35 cars; the other at the De La Warr Pavilion which holds 149 cars. Both car parks are surfaced with marked aisles and spaces and are charged by means of pay and display machines. The current level of charges are as follows:-

Less than 1 hour	50p
1 to 2 hours	60p
2 to 4 hours	120p
all day	220p
annual permit	£120

- 4.12 The car park at the De La Warr Pavilion can be conveniently divided into two with the area immediately in front of the Pavilion holding 61 cars, with the area east of the main entry point

holding 88 cars.

- 4.13 These car parks are generally well located in conventional terms for the town centre, although in practice perhaps less attractive to the more elderly resident population of Bexhill than is usual. Usage would also be influenced by the availability of free on-street parking nearby. To find out how well each off-street parking area was used and whether typical occupancy patterns could be established, surveys were carried out on Tuesday, 25th May and Friday, 11th June 1993. The surveys were done every hour starting at 0900 hrs. through to 1700 hrs. and were designed to coincide with similar surveys of on street parking in the town centre.
- 4.14 As might be expected the car park in Eversley Road was well used. For much of the day over three quarters of its available spaces were occupied falling to around half at the end of the survey period. What was perhaps more surprising was that nearly a quarter of the available spaces were occupied by the same car all day, while more than a half were occupied by the same car for the whole morning.
- 4.15 The western half of the De La Warr Pavilion car park was about half full for the middle part of the day tailing off to about a third in the early morning and late afternoon. A similar pattern was found in the eastern half. The table below gives the percentage of spaces which were occupied for the whole car park throughout both survey days.

De La Warr Pavilion Car Park

Percentage of spaces occupied

Time	25/5/93	11/6/93
0900	18	17
1000	38	36
1100	53	55
1200	56	48
1300	52	44
1400	42	38
1500	35	40
1600	32	36
1700	24	26

- 4.16 The incidence of long term parking was far less than at the Eversley Road car park and occurred mostly in the eastern half of the car park where about a tenth of available spaces were occupied by the same vehicle all day. Allowing for the number of spaces which remain available in both halves of the car park long term parking may not be a problem, but does need to be monitored.
- 4.17 Surveys of on street parking were carried out in Albert Road, Devonshire Road, Linden Road and Western Road. These roads were chosen to provide a typical sample of parking habits within the town centre. The graphs at the end of this section show that the majority of parking durations are less than 1 hour and well within current parking restrictions of a 2 hour waiting limit. Furthermore, the accumulation of parked vehicles on a road (with the exception of Devonshire Road) was generally within the maximum number of spaces available on that road. Even at Devonshire Road, the period when demand exceeded supply was limited and capable of being addressed by spaces available in adjacent streets. The results of the surveys are illustrated at the end of this report.
- 4.18 The survey results indicate that on street parking conditions generally in Bexhill Town Centre are one of a high turnover with spaces usually available for those who wish to park. They do not suggest

that changes to general parking conditions, such as providing more off street car parks, or introducing on street parking charges, are necessary. However, some localised detailed changes to parking arrangements may be required.

- 4.19 Service vehicles unloading during the day are sometimes the cause of minor congestion, particularly when in association with inconsiderate parking. A particular problem in Bexhill is the high incidence of disabled orange badge holders. When orange badged vehicles are parked in areas normally restricted to loading/congestion. This suggests a need for possible minor localised revisions to the current parking provision, but frequent, though informal, monitoring of the situation suggests that there is adequate overall provision of spaces for both user groups. Stricter enforcement of parking restrictions might help to alleviate these day to day problems.
- 4.20 Other informal monitoring of parking at Sainsbury's suggests that there are no significant current problems of access or availability. Proposals to deal with the possible need, identified earlier in this report, for improved parking facilities adjacent to Sainsbury's as an incentive for shoppers are therefore mainly concerned with issues of environmental improvements and/or retail vitality.
- 4.21 The parking surveys have indicated that there is no immediate shortfall in the amount of spaces available to visitors to the town centre and that generally access remains good. Indeed, this Study has concluded that there are no significant problems relating to traffic volumes, circulation or parking. It would therefore be possible to maintain the existing situation and accept that a limited amount of minor conflict between pedestrians and vehicles will occur. Works could be undertaken to improve the physical appearance of the main shopping streets by replacing footway paving, kerbs and street furniture with more appropriate traditional designs.
- 4.22 Although a programme of this kind would be welcomed it could not easily include works designed to calm traffic and provide more space for shoppers to move freely about the centre. Since the adoption of the District Council's Design Guide, many individual shop keepers have responded to the advice contained in the policy by installing new shop fronts which are far truer to the original spirit of Bexhill. It is important that these initiatives are not let down by the streets they front on to. The designation of the Town Centre as a conservation area should ensure that attention is focused on ways to enhance its character, and make it more attractive to both visitors and residents alike.
- 4.23 Continued ease of access is considered to be a crucial factor which should be used to determine the future patterns of circulation in the Town Centre. Measures which can retain a supply of on street parking supplemented by convenient off street parking will serve the needs of the local catchment population, many of whom rely on being able to park close to the shops and other services and make the centre more competitive in its own right.

Parking possibilities considered:

Reorganisation

- 4.24 Suggestions have been made over the years that if the parking in Devonshire Road was reorganised, taking advantage of the roads width, it would be possible to increase the number of available spaces. At present allowing for pedestrian crossings, junctions with side streets and their visibility zones, there are 45 spaces south of Boots.
- 4.25 A number of options have been assessed, different angled echelon parking bays, central reservation, and narrowed footways where necessary and none offer a significant increase in the number of spaces. Some options such as 30 degree echelon bays on both sides of the road would look most unattractive and in addition to dominating the scene with parked vehicles could lead to significant

access problems for deliveries. In addition the appearance of the conservation area's principal street would be severely harmed rather than enhanced.

- 4.26 Given the constraints referred to in paragraph 4.25 it has been extremely difficult to identify sites which are capable of providing suitable areas for new off street car parks. The direct relationship between environmental improvements and loss of kerb side parking has been noted already.

Multi-Storey Car Parking

- 4.27 One possibility which has been explored would have involved the conversion of the existing surface car park at Sainsbury's supermarket in Town Hall Square into a multi-decked car park. Ways were examined to provide Sainsbury's with a temporary car park while the works were taking place. It would have been possible to incorporate a footbridge into the new structure and provide shoppers with a convenient access across the railway and into Western Road.
- 4.28 Depending upon the number of split level decks which were added it could have been possible to provide something in the order of 150 extra car spaces. This would have allowed for a significant amount of pedestrian priority space to be created in the town centre. Unfortunately discussions with the company have proved unsuccessful and this option has to be abandoned at least for the time being.

Wainwright Road

- 4.29 Consideration has also been given to ways in which the surface car park at Wainwright Road could be made more attractive to shoppers. The difficulty is that although this car park is actually quite close to the Town Centre, its siting creates an impression of being more distant. It is difficult to see how these inherent defects can be easily overcome. Even with improved surfacing and permanent manning during the day, the footpath leading to Terminus Road is narrow and not designed to welcome use. For many, especially the towns older residents this car park is simply not an acceptable option, though with suitable marking out it is capable of accommodating up to 120 cars.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS: RESTORING THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

- 5.1 Changes to traffic flows in Bexhill town centre expected from the Bexhill and Hastings bypass, the Bexhill Northern Approach Road and new developments in north Bexhill are not forecast to be significant. Despite any imperfections in the existing circulation system, there is no inherent operational need to alter the current patterns of circulation within the town centre either now or to cater for those forecast future changes.
- 5.2 The surveys of both on and off street parking have demonstrated that there is spare capacity in the off street car parks while on street spaces are occupied for a relatively short time thus maximising the number of vehicles which can find parking in the centre. That is not to say that improvement is not possible either in terms of localised changes in on street parking arrangements and some experimentation with the scale of charges for off-street parking.
- 5.3 To some extent problems are a matter of perception. It was however the unanimous view of all the officers concerned with this study that given the results of the research, it would be better to devote scarce resources to improving the environment of the Town Centre rather than make changes in traffic and parking management which might be of marginal value.
- 5.4 One of the main results of this study has been to draw a balance between proposals which promote maximum accessibility on the one hand and those which call for a wholly traffic free environment on the other. Wherever the line is drawn however there is likely to be a reduction of kerb side parking spaces, how many of these spaces are replaced by other means is a matter of judgement and practical opportunities.
- 5.5 The constraints which are imposed by the areas status as a conservation area, and retail function together with the economic structure of the region rule out those kind of proposals favoured in the past, which relied on acquisition of property for demolition to create alternative parking and delivery points, which are necessary to support complete pedestrianisation schemes. In any event the physical scale and character of Bexhill Town Centre has been largely defined by having been accessible to all classes of vehicles including the motor car from its earliest days. This and the needs of local residents suggest solutions which would retain as much kerb side access while extending and improving the quality of space available to pedestrians.
- 5.6 The development of and funding arrangements for any such environmentally-led schemes must be the subject of a separate assessments. There may be some scope for the integration of normal maintenance programmes and any proposed environmental enhancement programmes.
- 5.7 The final sections of this Study looks at the kind of opportunities for improvements which are available and presents them for public comment.

6.0 A PROPOSED INVENTORY OF STREET FURNISHINGS & MATERIALS FOR THE TOWN CENTRE

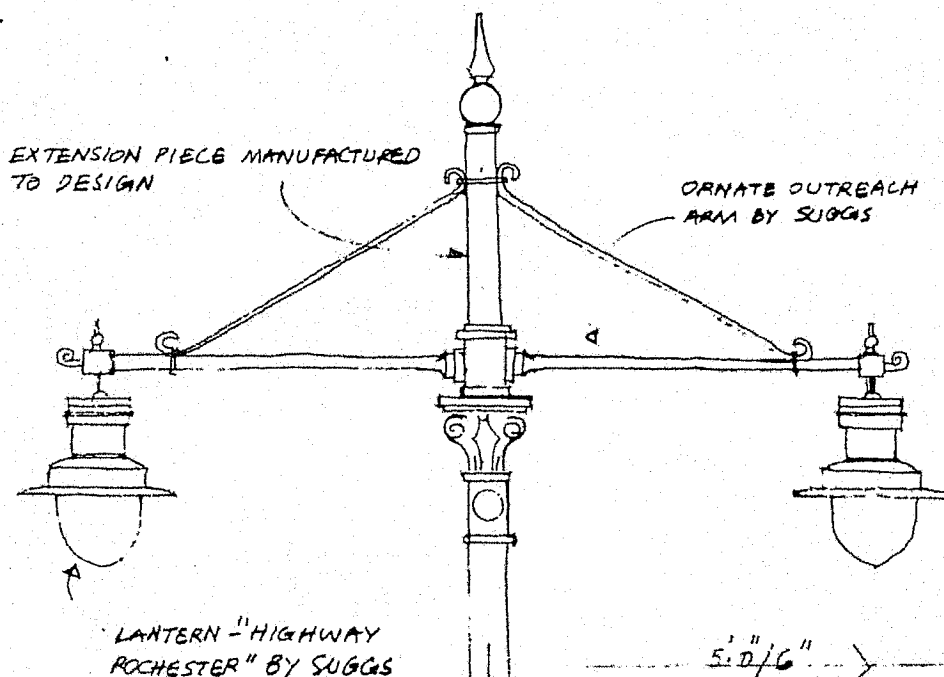
- 6.1 The conclusion which has been broadly drawn from the report suggests improvements to the appearance of streets in the Town Centre and the way those streets are used, rather than wholesale reconstruction. What is equally clear is a pressing need to raise the quality of product which is used to construct and furnish the area.
- 6.2 Where appropriate the proposals have been designed to increase an area's distinctiveness while maintaining the Town Centre's overall character. Materials have been chosen which contribute to a common visual theme; one of the key symbols of identity for any area is the colour and texture of its building materials.
- 6.3 For the high Victorian and Edwardian parts of Bexhill this is undeniably a warm pinky red. Principal elevations are constructed from an imported red stock, while the less public walls around the sides are more often as not local pinky brown Lunsford bricks. Roofs are a mixture of Welsh slate or red clay tile, now increasingly replaced with red concrete tiles. It seems likely that the pavements were constructed from concrete slabs very early in the Town Centre's life and early examples survive with a dense pink granolithic wearing surface.
- 6.4 The selection for a palette of materials and street furnishings has been made quite deliberately by using surviving examples, as a guide for new reproductions where appropriate or sympathetic alternatives. An inventory has been drawn up to provide not only a brief for the enhancement measures described later in this report, but as a means of co-ordinating future action.

Before describing the individual proposals in detail it may be helpful to identify the individual items included in the inventory:-

Street Lighting

- 6.5 Bexhill is fortunate to have some examples of its historic lamp columns which have survived later modernisation programmes. In part this is due to one type having always been wired for an electrical service from the start and do not pose quite the same kind of safety problems as their earlier gas supplied counterparts.
- 6.6 It is recorded that the Bexhill District Council first illuminated the town's streets by electricity from its own undertaking in 1900. It seems likely that the tall cast iron columns in Town Hall Square date from this period. They have an elaborately cast pedestal which contains an access door to the services inside and which bears arms of the Bishop of Chichester and Earl De La Warr enclosed by the script "Bexhill District Council". There is also a single lamp column directly outside the Town Hall itself which has a more slender character and may have been used originally on the promenades, though the photographic evidence for this is not conclusive. Neither examples retain their original lanterns.
- 6.7 There are also a number of examples of a small lamp column in Cornwall Road. These columns once again the original lanterns are lost, do contain a services access door which suggests an electrical supply from the start, though they also possess ladder bars and a lantern gallery suggesting gas.
- 6.8 The need to enhance local identity and create a distinctive sense of place has been referred to already. Lamp columns are amongst the most prominent pieces of furniture in any street and the use of these two columns, those in Town Hall Square and Cornwall Road as patterns from which to cast replicas would provide a strong sense of local identity.

1a



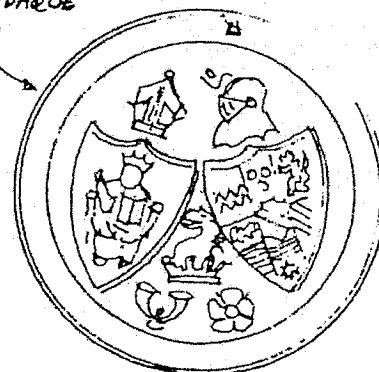
8'0"

5'0" / 6"

THIS SECTION OF LAMP COLUMN
TO BE CAST FROM A PATTERN
TAKEN FROM THE ORIGINAL
COLUMNS IN TOWN HALL SQUARE
AND CAST FOR BEXHILL MBC.

PERIMETER SCRIPT TO READ
"ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL • EAST
SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL 199 •"
OR SIMILAR —

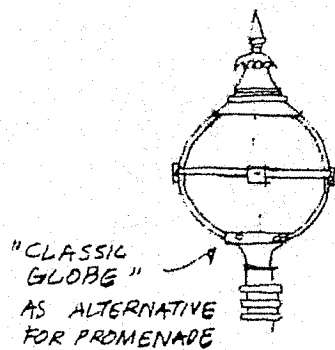
DOOR PLAQUE
DETAIL



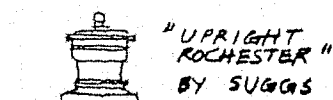
18'0" / 6"

PROPOSED "REVIVAL"
LAMP COLUMN FOR
DEVONSHIRE ROAD
SCALE 3/8" TO 1'0"

1b



NB: NO LADDER
BARS ON
COLUMN



MODERN SWAN NECK
FITTING

PREFERRED CHOICE IS
A RECASTING OF THE
" CORNWALL ROAD" COLUMN
HOWEVER

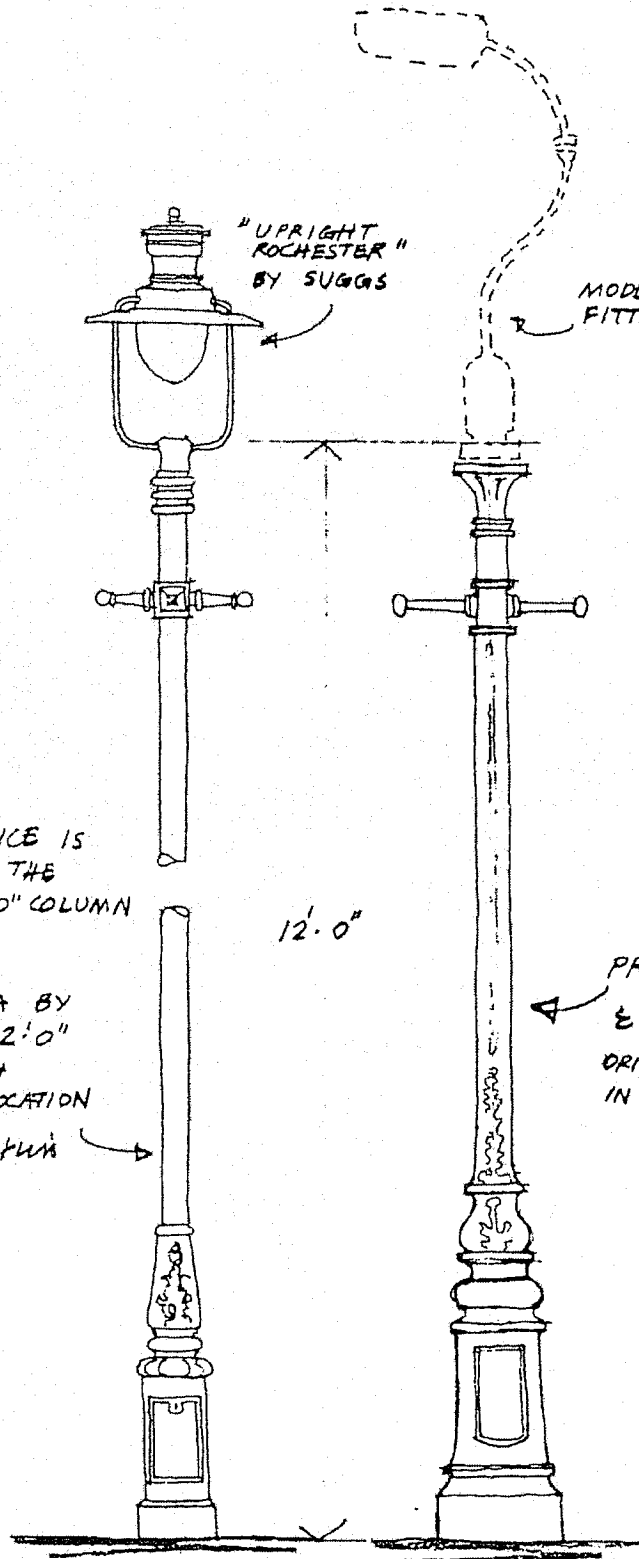
MODERN REPLICA BY
SUGGS TO BE 12'0"
TO 16'0" HIGH
DEPENDING ON LOCATION

IF COST VALUES TURN
OUT

12'0"

PREFERRED CHOICE

ORIGINAL PATTERN SITED
IN CORNWALL ROAD



PROPOSED LAMP COLUMNS
FOR BEXHILL TOWN CENTRE
SCALE 1/2" TO 1'0"

- 6.9 Details of both lamp columns are shown on the following pages, both are fitted with a style of lantern which reflects the character of the early electrical fittings and those used in the Town Centre originally. An alternative lantern is suggested for use along the lower promenade in front of the Colonnade and Channel View. It is proposed to install the tall column and double lantern lamp (1a) in Devonshire Road and the smaller column (1b) elsewhere as appropriate.
- 6.10 In practice it may be necessary to supplement the revival lamps with additional discreetly sited wall lights to provide an overall ambient illumination to modern day standards while having the character of traditional "tungsten" like point lighting from the new columns.

Footway paving

- 6.11 Surveys have shown that within the Town Centre a little under half of all streets have retained their traditional flagged footways, the remainder are predominantly black macadam with an occasional red macadam surface. Surprisingly perhaps there is almost a 100% survival of granite kerbs, mainly flat 12" x 6" kerbs but with some 8" x 8" and 6" x 6" in side roads and along Marina.
- 6.12 Unfortunately most of the surviving flagged footways contain a wide variety of slabs ranging from "original" pale pink granolithic surfaced slabs, through to later fine black aggregate pink/red slabs and modern hydraulically pressed pink concrete slabs.
- 6.13 The County Engineer has difficulty preventing delivery vehicles from mounting the footways which causes considerable damage, leading to pressure to replace traditional large flats with either tarmac or small element slabs (16" x 16" square). Neither of these two alternatives reflect either the character of the Town Centre or its scale. The County Engineer has however recognised the importance of maintaining the appearance of the Conservation Area and has recently carried out essential repairs using 3' 0" x 2' 0" pink slabs or red macadam.
- 6.14 What is needed is a commitment to the use of large rectangular slabs laid with a broken bond. Existing slabs need to be lifted and sorted so that individual streets can have their pavements relayed using slabs of one kind. This is particularly true of Devonshire Road where the slabs are especially patchy.

Litter Bins

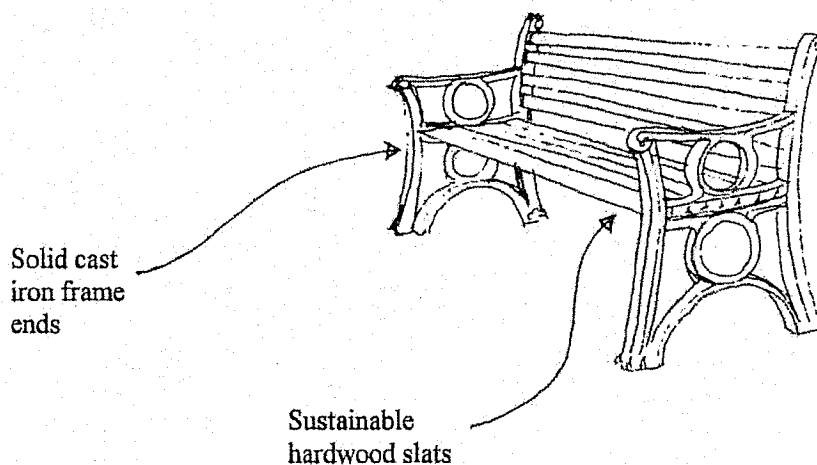
- 6.15 At the present time there are something in the order of 60 litter bins in the Town Centre, most are of the lidded variety and moulded in two-tone dark brown and beige plastic. Whether this number are needed or their siting is correct is not at issue. What is certainly clear is that their design, though simple and inoffensive in itself, is wholly unsuitable for an Edwardian town centre.
- 6.16 It is proposed to introduce a distinctive octagonal cast-iron litter bin embellished with horizontal gold bands and an appropriate crest or logo. This may be an area where individual business sponsors might wish to become involved.

Seating

- 6.17 Creating places to rest, and gather strength or simply watch the world go by is an essential part of any town centre. There are 18 seats in Bexhill Town Centre which may be categorised as follows:-
- all timber traditional park bench
 - metal framed, timber planks or slats
 - concrete framed, timber planks

Over half have been donated or commemorate an event or person.

- 6.18 When the Council decided to install new seats in its gardens at Marina/Marina Court Avenue, it was decided to choose a seat with a more traditional urban appearance which could provide a model for any scheme to augment and replace the existing seats in the Town Centre.
- 6.19 There was no shortage of choice; in recent years there has been a huge increase in the production of "heritage" cast iron street furniture. The difficulty was to find a design which was not too flamboyant and yet had an element of decorative detail. The seat illustrated below was chosen for its robust proportions and sturdy vandal proof qualities.



Bollards

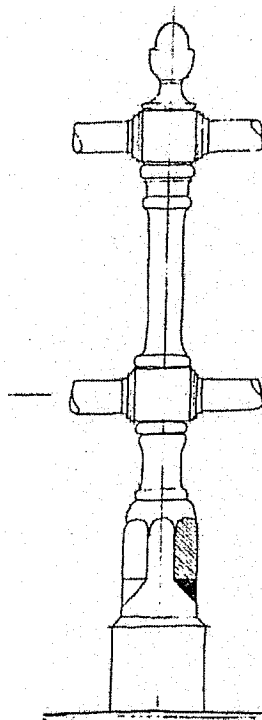
- 6.20 Historically bollards seem to have been put up to prevent vehicular access to passageways or yard entrances used by pedestrians. Increasingly they are now being installed as a form of heavy duty fence to prevent vehicles parking on areas of pavement. There is a real danger that what was once an attractive piece of street furniture becomes an ugly one because it is being used for the wrong purpose. Nevertheless there will be occasions when additional bollards may be necessary as individual barrier posts or linked by chains to create a fence. The County Council has already a wooden pattern made up from which to make castings and which is unique to East Sussex. It seems appropriate to continue to install this bollard when necessary rather than introducing another style.

Promenade & Street Railings

- 6.21 When the sea wall was largely reconstructed during the 1980s the original cast iron decorative posts which supported the horizontal rails, were replaced by simple modern tubular posts. While serving their purpose well, their appearance relates poorly to the Edwardian character which is particularly prominent along by the Colonnade and Channel View.
- 6.22 Further east beside the Sailing Club and beyond the original railings survive. The sketch reproduced below shows the typical heavy detailing of the posts.

A search of the current product lines of the country's leading manufacturers of street furniture has identified a system which though a little lighter in structure replicates the general detail of the "Bexhill" railing quite well.

Street railings would have a similar "acorn" finial but incorporate vertical railings between slim horizontal bars instead of two relatively heavy horizontal tubes.



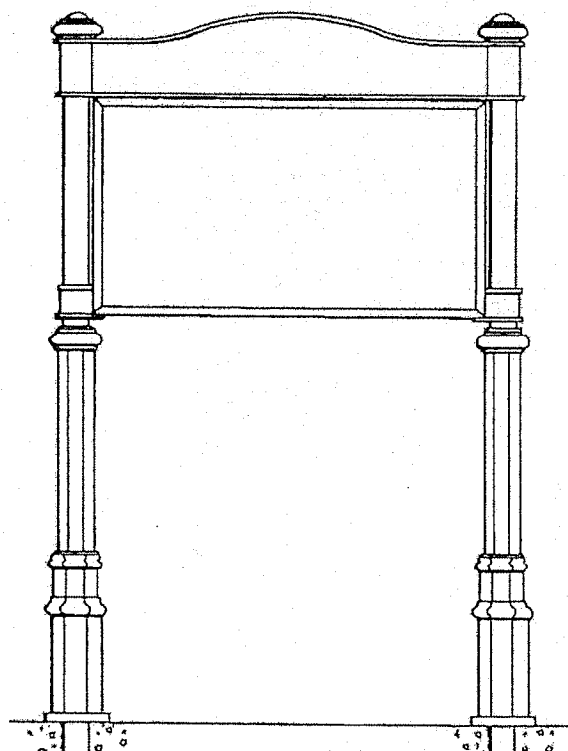
Pedestrian & Tourist Information Signs

- 6.23 It is proposed initially to erect three Tourist Information Points at the following locations, each one with a detailed explanation of the area in which it is sited.

- Devonshire Square - The Town Centre
- The Colonnade - The Seaside
- De La Warr Parade - The Motoring Pioneers

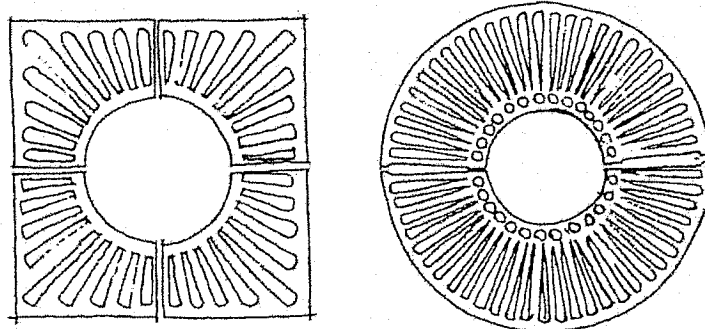
The posts would be octagonal and feature domed finials

Pedestrian finger posts would be similar



Trees & Grilles

- 6.24 In its Edwardian heyday Devonshire Road, and other streets in the Town Centre were lined with trees, a few still survive in Devonshire Road and Sackville Road. There are now severe constraints on planting new trees in the footways because of the numerous public services which are located in them. British Gas for example stipulate that trees must not be planted within 2 metres of any mains service. This is likely to pose difficulties along the east side of Devonshire Road, Square and Western side of Sackville Road.
- 6.25 Nevertheless the draft schemes which are set out following this section do contain replanting proposals on the basis that what is being put forward is simply a reinstatement of what had existed. The re-introduction of trees into selected streets can probably do more to enhance the shoppers experience of that street than any other single improvement.
- 6.26 The choice of species is not easy; previous specimens appear to have been a fastigate or upright habit elm. Clearly a fastigate variety has obvious advantages in an urban location but any elm may fall prey to disease in the future and it seems prudent to consider an alternative species.
- 6.27 A tree which seems to be a suitable alternative is the Caucasian Lime (*Tilia enchlora*) which has an upright habit with good green coloured shoots and leaves. The glossy foliage is free from greenfly infestation and the tree is tolerant of clay and sandy soils and highly resistant to smoke and fumes; the Forestry Commission recommend its use for roads and streets.
- 6.28 The spacing between each tree which has been shown is based on the original planting grid so that where existing trees survive they can be integrated into the new planting scheme. The trees would need to be set in specially excavated pits which are provided with watering/feeding points and finished with a perforated heavy cast iron grille similar to the patterns shown below.



Colours

- 6.29 Most town centre enhancement schemes feature a range of cast-iron "heritage" style street furniture; usually all are finished in plain black or with an element of gold detail. The advantages of choosing furniture with a common theme and where possible local identity has been mentioned already. Colour can emphasise local identity and promote a sense of distinctiveness.
- 6.30 A range of materials for street surfacing and construction have already been suggested and if chosen would reinforce the red colour theme which the Town Centre already has. It is considered that a black paint finish which had a hint of green (BS.12 B 29) not dissimilar to a dark pre war British racing green would harmonize well with this theme and look very well with any gold or heraldic detailing.

Bus Shelters

- 6.31 The existing combined bus shelters and advertisement panels are simple structures with clean modern lines. However, the same criticisms which were made of the litter bins and seats applies equally. There can be no half measures if a successful restoration of character is to be achieved.
- 6.32 Several manufacturers now make revival shelters which combine a decorative cast iron frame with fretted or toughened glass panels. The examples which have been considered to date all seem to feature an unconvincing roof design in marked contrast to the wall framing and supporting brackets which are generally convincing. At this stage however it is more important to recognise that a replacement for the existing models will be needed and budgeted for.

7.0 **THE DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR
THE ENHANCEMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS**

7.1 The improved street surfaces and furnishings which have been described have been brought together to provide the basis for the enhancement of a number of key sites. These proposals have been drawn up following discussions with the County Engineer and the Council's Director of Recreation and Tourism and Chief Environmental Services Officer.

7.2 Four key areas for action have been identified:-

The Primary Shopping Street	●	Devonshire Road
Meeting Places	●	Devonshire Square
Commercial Links	●	Western Road
	●	Sackville Road
The Sea Side Identity	●	Colonnade/Channel View

Taking each area in turn, the draft proposals, which are shown on drawing no. 2 and the relevant detailed drawings are as follows:-

Devonshire Road:

7.3 The scale of Devonshire Road was determined deliberately to make it the principal street in the Town Centre and provide a direct link between the sea, promenade and railway station. With private forecourts, footways and carriageway it is a little under 70' 0" wide building frontage to frontage.

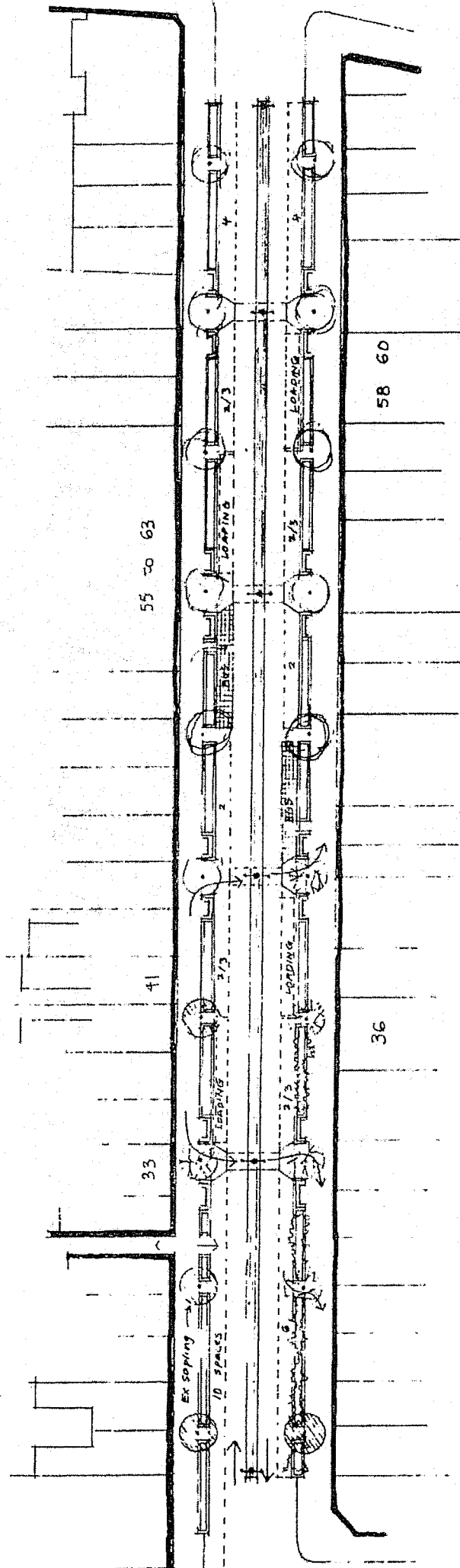
7.4 The present day character, with the loss of its street trees and central light columns is of a traffic dominated sea of tarmac and vehicles and not at all comfortable for pedestrians to use. Restoration of the roads centrally placed cast iron lamp columns - drawing 1a (described in para 6.9) would do much to reduce the vastness of the space and could be of immediate benefit to its character.

7.5 A scheme has been designed which builds on this theme to produce a structured boulevard for Devonshire Road south of Parkhurst Road. The centrally placed lamp columns coincide with the existing grid of street trees which are replanted at 60' 0" intervals down either side of the road. The repaved footways would be separated from the carriageway by low red brick planters with seating areas set regularly beside the four defined crossing places. There would be on street car parking on each side of the road providing 40 spaces as opposed to the existing arrangement which has 45.

7.6 The final arrangement which is shown on drawing no. 3 and as a typical bay on drawing no. 4 is intended to reinforce the overall colour theme for the Town Centre by the choice of suggested materials. The footways and private forecourts would be laid in a pink flag, the red brick walls of the planters would echo the walls of the buildings and should be planted with varieties which produce lush foliage and red flowers. The carriageways would be surfaced with deep red chipped asphalt, the edges of the parking bays defined by a line of brick pavers, which in turn are to be used to form the central reserve within which the lamps are proposed and the raised cross over points.

7.7 The whole scheme is designed to break down the scale of the space so that vehicles feel less comfortable and proceed more slowly, while retaining the street's strong sense of axis. The tree and flower planting are intended to provide two distinct layers of softening.

3



DEVONSHIRE ROAD

EXISTING ON STREET CAR SPACES 45
(EXCLUDES ANY UNLOADING BAYS)

"BOULEVARD" OPTION 40

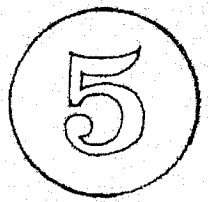
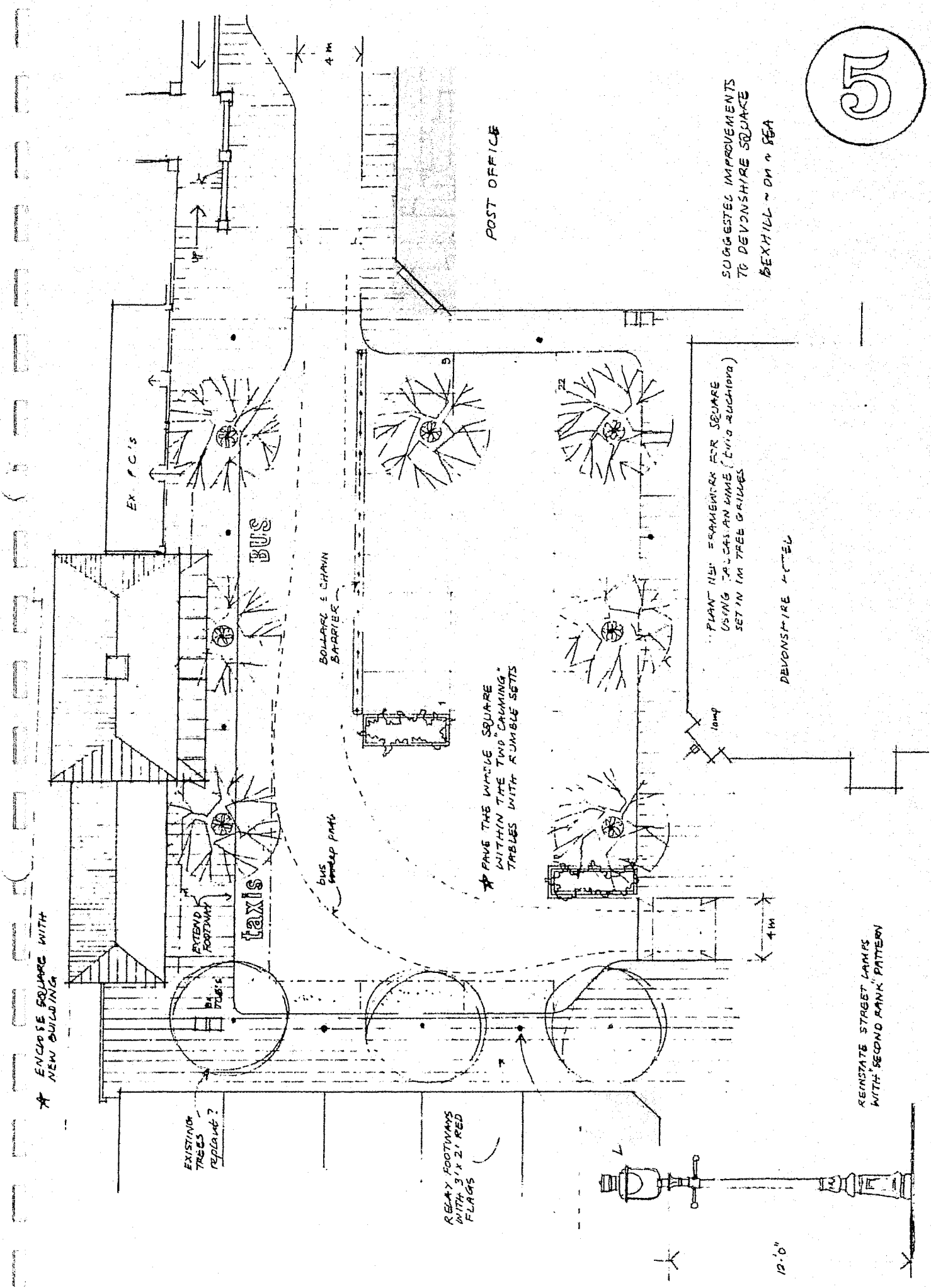
DEVONSHIRE ROAD :-
TYPICAL BAY SHOWING
TRAFFIC CALMING & PLANTING

Devonshire Square

- 7.8 The photographs taken of Devonshire Square during the last decade of the last century show an enclosed humane space. It was always busy, with horse drawn carriages and carts making their deliveries of people and packages to the station, at that time still located in the Square, and the Post Office(which was housed in the station).
- 7.9 The relocation of the Station to Upper Sea Road and the loss of its traditional street lamps and trees has deprived the Square now open to the north, of much of its sense of enclosure and most of its charm. Over half the carriageway space now houses a car park which provides 28 convenient spaces for visitors to the main Post Office, the remainder provides a short link between Sackville Road and Sea Road via Western Road plus a town centre taxi rank and salvage depot.
- 7.10 The opportunity has been taken to restructure the space while maintaining its essential functions so that its former character can be recaptured. An important element in the proposals shown on drawing number 5 is the planting of new street trees which will help to emphasise the shape of the Square as an urban space. The reintroduction of a building to close the northern edge could be of crucial benefit.
- 7.11 The intention would be to extend the footway on the north side of the Square in order to produce a more practical development site for a new building. The area available to vehicles would be less than at present and traffic calming entry and exit points formed to reduce through spends. By resurfacing the whole carriageway area with concrete "rumble" setts, both its appearance and calming performance can be improved.
- 7.12 Access to the car park is at a single point on its western side and would be emphasised by the construction of a red brick planter on either side. The northern boundary would be defined by a row of bollards with a heavy chain suspended between them.
- 7.13 The perimeter already made stronger visually by new tree planting would be reinforced with new street lamps. It is suggested that these are modelled on the pattern 1b described in para..... and would have a similar lantern to the new street lamps for Devonshire Road but supported on a frame rather than suspended from a bracket. The proposals are designed to bring down the scale to a more pedestrian level and at the same time allow its important link function to continue.

Western Road:

- 7.14 Western Road is arguably the busiest street in the Town Centre where the potential for conflict between vehicles and shoppers is at its greatest. A view has been put forward that it would be an ideal street to turn into a pedestrian area. The scale of the street and nature of its businesses certainly seem appropriate, the great difficulty is the lack of suitable sites to replace the parking spaces lost as a result and the problems associated with services.
- 7.15 It is considered that the special needs of Bexhill's residents should be recognised, as a result the proposals put forward have sought to maintain a reasonable level of on-street car parking while introducing traffic calming measures to soften the impact of vehicles on the street and increase the amount of space available to pedestrians.
- 7.16 For this reason the design shown on drawing no. 6 retains the roads linking function between Sackville Road and Sea Road and a degree of on-street car parking spaces; approximately 27 compared to 40 at present. The carriageway which has the advantage of already being one way only is shown narrowed down to a minimum of 10' 0". The footways on the south side of the road made





slightly wider and incorporate two equally spaced delivery bays, while the northern footway on the sunny side of the street, is extended by some 13 feet with separate parking bays alongside.

- 7.17 The extra width of footway on the north side is used to allow planting new street trees at 60 feet centres and a new central "point of focus" is created with the construction of a cast-iron and glass seating/meeting area. The red colour theme has been followed once again with flagged footways, red tumble setts in the parking and delivery bays and a red chipped carriageway. It is intended that street lighting would continue as present with bracket mounted lamps on the building frontages, but additional traditional columns could be installed to provide "pin point" lighting effects if wished.

Sackville Road:

- 7.18 Of all the streets in the Town Centre, Sackville Road in many ways retains its essential Edwardian character. It has long ranges of ornamental terraces on either side of the road, most retain the original architectural features while at street level the small scale individual shopfronts remain.

- 7.19 At this stage it is proposed to limit the highway improvements to replanting the street trees on either side, and replacing four concrete lamp columns with the cast-iron columns modelled on those in Cornwall Road. Future proposals could include, new paving seats and enhancement measures for the railway bridge.

- 7.20 So far the proposals which have been described have all related to the Town Centre itself, however its function as a shopping centre is inextricably bound up with Bexhill's function as a sea side resort. Visitors to the town wish to enjoy its safe clean beaches, take advantage of its easily accessible sea front.

- 7.21 The De La Warr Pavilion has from its inception been seen as a focus for the town and the sea front. It was designed to operate on a number of levels and continues to do so. It is both host to shows of all kinds, while offering bar and restaurant facilities for visitors and residents alike.

- 7.22 The parking surveys which have been referred to illustrate the important part which the Pavilion's car park plays in the life of the Town Centre. While this report has concentrated on the Town Centre it cannot be seen in isolation from the sea front and the De La Warr Pavilion. The image of one is indivisible from the other. This report is about building on Bexhill's past to secure its future.

- 7.23 The next section describes briefly a number of steps which may form part of future proposals at the sea front and Colonnade.

The Colonnade/Channel View:

- 7.24 Setting aside the Pavilion for obvious reasons, the Colonnade provides the sea front with one of Bexhill's enduring images (the Edward VII Memorial clock is another). The loss of the bandstand and later the projecting semi-circle of lower promenade have seriously weakened its visual strength but it still remains a significant monument to those last few years of peace at the end of the Edwardian era.

- 7.25 Other changes have all led to a gradual and cumulative loss of character, culminating with the loss of most of the ornate sea wall railings in 1983, only those immediately in front of The Colonnade itself have survived.

- 7.26 Future proposals will need to look at ways of restoring to some extent the area's appearance. It is probably unrealistic to consider any substantial reconstruction of the sea wall itself, or indeed the

band stand, though to do so would immediately make sense of the existing covered area behind the Colonnade's columns and which originally accommodated audiences.

- 7.27 In any event, the role of the Colonnade has altered in recent years and now houses a café, ice cream kiosk and other activities associated with the beach. There is scope however for upgrading the standard of finishes, especially where customers presently sit outside to eat.
- 7.28 Proposals designed to restore the character of the Colonnade should be complemented by improvements to the sea wall railings and pedestrian lighting. Both of these items have been fully described in the earlier part of this section which sets out the "inventory of street furnishings" and could be installed without having to wait for other works to be carried

The cost implications and sources of funding

- 8.0 In order to give some indication of the scale of costs rough budget estimates have been prepared which provide the following totals:

Primary Shopping Street	● Devonshire Road	£250,000
Meeting Places	● Devonshire Square	£ 85,000
Commercial Links	● Western Road	£130,000
	○ Sackville Road	£ 45,000
The Sea Side Identity	● Colonnade/Channel View	£100,000
Total		£610,000

More detailed work on costs and implementation will need to be done to progress individual projects once the public and local authorities have considered and commented on the proposals.



BEXHILL TOWN CENTRE